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INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002726

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/24/2018

TAGS: PGOV IR IIZ

SUBJECT: FADILAH PARTY LEADER ON "SADR'S AMBASSADORS"

REF: A. 08BAGHDAD 2471
 1B. 08BAGHDAD 2089
 1C. 08BAGHDAD 2084

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor Greg D'Elia for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

(U) This is a PRT Wasit reporting cable.

11. (S//REL USA, ACGU) Summary: Fadilah party spiritual leader and Wasit university professor Shaykh Abbas al-Zaydi predicted that ISCI would commit widespread fraud in provincial elections in an August 17 meeting with U.S. officials. He also discussed his new youth-focused organization, "Sadr's Ambassadors," and pressed for the reintegration of Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) Commander Hussein Fallah. End Summary.

Biased GEO

12. (C//REL USA, ACGU) Abbas met with PRT and 41 FIB Commanding Officer on August 17 at Forward Operating Base Delta. He is not surprised at low turnout at Voter Registration Centers in Wasit, suggesting that voter passivity reflects their anticipation of likely electoral fraud. "Why should people go to register? There is no point." Abbas echoed the view of other PRT contacts (REF A) that the new Wasit IHEC GEO, Dr. Kadhem Abdul al Shemmar, is there to do ISCI's bidding. "Dr. Kadhem is an ex-Baathist" who replaced acting GEO Haidar Abed Allawi ("one of the finest civil servants in the country") "with the help of COR ISCI member Salim Jasur Hasun al-Shammari." Abbas explained how a partisan GEO could impact the elections: "It is easy. Poll workers simply mark a ballot a second time and it will be invalidated. In any case, most of Wasit is made up of illiterate farmers, who will rely on poll workers to help them vote."

Small parties face religious challenge

13. (C//REL USA, ACGU) Abbas expects that Wasit PC Chair Mohammed Hassan Jabber will run for reelection, despite protestations to the contrary, as part of a coalition including Da'wa, ISCI, and the so-called "Independent List" organized by Hajji Kareem Yusuf al Shenein. (Note: Wasit's ISCI and Da'wa party heads have both told PRT they do not expect to participate in coalitions before the election (REF B). End Note.) Referring to the proliferation of small independent lists, Abbas offered that "there is a problem for these smaller parties, even if they have popularity, and the problem is that the people are afraid of the religious leaders. If Sayyid Sistani just raises his finger, the people will do what he says." (Note: In a June meeting with PRT Abbas said almost exactly the opposite (REF C). End note.) Abbas claimed the Prince of the Rabiyyeh to be among Fadilah's Wasit supporters.

Sadr's Ambassadors

¶4. (C//REL USA, ACGU) Abbas described his fledgling organization, "Sadr's Ambassadors," as a means of reclaiming the mantle of Mohammed al Sadr while reintegrating JAM foot soldiers and hangers on. "The young people today know nothing of the legacy of Mohammed Sadiq al Sadr. The 'Ambassadors' is a way to help the younger generation learn this history." The group has been started in Baghdad with \$30,000 in funding from local businessmen, enough for six months of operation, and Abbas suggested the possibility of a Wasit branch funded by CF. Asked to describe the organization further, Abbas said it was "cultural and educational" and was focusing on the poor and disenfranchised young people of Sadr City, but did not otherwise explain how the group would work or whether it was patterned after similar organizations.

ISF Overreaching

¶5. (C//REL USA, ACGU) Abbas expressed mild concern at claimed overreaching by Wasit ISF. "When they are looking for someone they go to the person's house and disrupt the home," he said. "Yet most of these conflicts are personal. In March, after the events in Basrah, (ISF) drove to a Hosseynayiah in Zuwayrjiat and played loud music. Actions like these create a negative atmosphere for everyone." (Note. Zuwayrjiat is a poor neighborhood in al Kut that has been a locus of JAM activity. End note.)

Hussein Fallah

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¶6. (S//REL USA, ACGU) Abbas said he was "surprised" to hear that CF had recently plastered posters of JAM Commander Hussein Fallah Hassan al Abaydi around Wasit. 41 FIB CO COL Richard Francey explained that Fallah is a wanted man who has "done things that resulted in CF being sent back in body bags," adding that 41 FIB is a much larger force than the Brigade that preceded it and that this new reach will enable the brigade to be more aggressive in pursuing targets of interest. Abbas responded that Hussein had not committed any anti-CF actions in the past year and had in fact been aiding Iraqi intelligence: "Even if Hussein Fallah did kill people, let us use him so that more people do not get killed." COL Francey noted that Fallah has been "continuing to communicate with local JAM members. His involvement since leaving Wasit has been less direct, more in the nature of supervising," but offered that he is "open to discussions with any individual provided there are no caveats or preconditions to discussions," and promised safe passage for individuals in such cases.

Comment

¶7. (C//REL USA, ACGU) Knowledgeable and deliberate, when Shaykh Abbas says he has "studied the ways of Jaysh al-Mahdi for five years," PRT is inclined to believe him. The idea of reclaiming the legacy of Mohammed al Sadr is obviously intriguing, especially if it involves reclaiming the wayward followers of Muqtada al Sadr in the bargain. Other Wasit Fadilah party leaders have complained (REF B) about the party's political "marginalization," and Shaykh Abbas's comments anticipating electoral manipulation may suggest that his party does not anticipate great success at the ballot box. End comment.

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